



***Interiors From the Mind:***  
***Pictorial Illusionism within Painting***

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree Master of Fine Art.

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## **Abstract**

This project sets out to investigate spatial illusion within realist painting.

Observations concerning speculative architectural constructs as a pictorial space provides the content for the project. This research develops visual strategies with the intention of enhancing the viewers' perceptual experience of an illusionary space.

The aim of this project has been to push beyond traditions of illusory pictorial spaces that have informed the research. To extend those representations, a series of methodologies were developed that fuse both the virtual architectural space of digital imaging with the pictorial illusionism of painting that reflects the techniques formulated by early fifteenth century Flemish painters.

The paintings are constructed from multiple digitally captured photographs of interior architecture, reconstructed into fictional spaces through digital manipulation. The spaces feature multiple entry/exit points that are ambiguous and devoid of human presence. Extraneous details are removed from the sourced imagery and the resulting spaces are vast, labyrinthine, artificially lit passageways. Central to the project is the duplicity apparent in mirrors and reflections. These are employed as devices to lead the viewer to speculate and contemplate the ambiguities within the painting.

The outcome is a group of paintings submitted for examination; the exhibition contains the original discourse of the project.

The exegesis chronicles the practical and conceptual inquiries, together with an exploration of the issues significant to the project, placed in context through discussions of historical and contemporary practice.



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## **Part 1 – central argument**

### **The Project Outline**

- Observations concerning the relationship between speculative architectural constructs and pictorial illusionism provide the content.
- A series of methodologies were developed to explore the possibilities of this relationship.
- The problem within painting is to find pictorial form for the representation of virtual space.
- Through investigations and experimentation, approaches to representing virtual spaces through architectural constructs, have been developed and refined.
- The outcome is a group of paintings submitted for examination; the exhibition contains the original discourse of the project.

### **Introduction**

The research project investigates the representation of virtual space through the construction of the pictorial space within painting. The project locates the perception of both virtual and pictorial space within the viewer and as a conceptual space outside of the material world; the research foregrounds virtual space as shifting, unstable, ambiguous and boundless.

Architectural interior constructs are used as a vehicle to define space pictorially, thus providing a recognisable format through which the illusion of space can be generated and navigated. The context of the project is located in the development and construction of virtual spaces in painting, both past and present, and the expansion of virtual navigation through the advent of the computer.

By employing digital imaging technology to construct architectural spaces, and by considering visual theories that can locate the perception of images within the body of the spectator, the project aims to find alternate approaches to pictorial construction within painting.

The underlying motivation for the research is twofold. Firstly, historical European painting fuels my fascination for illusory pictorial spaces. Specifically the ways that artists, such as Velázquez and seventeenth century Dutch painters, have constructed pictures that draw the spectator into the image, and establish an interactive viewing experience through the use of ambiguity and spatial anomalies. These works become, in this way, a point of mediation between vision and cognition. My imagination has been captured by the refinement of painterly techniques that allowed these artists to depict spaces, rather than surfaces, and that have led to the creation of virtual space.

The second motivation is located with the potentiality of digital imaging technology. This relatively new medium not only presents alternative approaches to image and spatial construction, but also presents the opportunity to consider existing languages of representation in new ways.

The project brings these two concerns together, in an endeavour, to understand the new potential that computer technology has made possible to the painter and the spectator in the conception of the virtual. Furthermore, the project demonstrates how new representations of virtual space extend the history of pictorial illusionism.

### **The Problem**

The problem posed by the project is to find visual means to represent the changing conception of virtual space within painting.

### **Virtual + Space**

The term virtual is an abstract concept. Virtual does not have the appearance of form, and exists as effect not as reality. Virtual is a void<sup>1</sup> that needs spatial form in order for us to project ourselves into it.

To conceive the concept of 'virtual' as a space it needs to have form and appearance. Anthony Vidler makes the point in his book *Warped Space* that the term 'virtual space' is generated in order to curb the unthinkable – the absolute void, emptiness. However, Vidler points out the problem with using the term void to describe virtual spaces:

*Even to describe them this way is to engage with our own conventions that force us to understand the spaceless in spatial terms... The term virtual*

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<sup>1</sup> Theorists define the term void as the notion of 'empty space'. The idea of the void is ambiguous as it is linked to the confusion about the paradoxical existence of nothing – for nothing is precisely what there is in empty space.

*space may well be an attempt to ward off the difficult notion of spatially absent.*<sup>2</sup>

The notion of void and emptiness, as space, is conceptually linked to theories of sublimation<sup>3</sup> proposed by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, in which he delineated the idea of a 'zone of emptiness'. In Lacanian terms the zone of emptiness within pictorial illusionism can be described as - the tension between what we can represent (for example, an architectural depiction) and what we cannot represent (a feeling of spatial disorientation), in effect, this tension creates a void. For Lacan, the solution was to define the void as a space, a zone that is always beyond what we can represent, symbolise or give meaning to. In order to understand this concept in relation to virtual space, we need to fully understand its definition. In his book *Stealing the Mona Lisa* psychoanalyst Darian Leader describes Lacan's concept of a 'zone of emptiness' as having two parts: (A) The idea of an early traumatic experience that we cannot understand directly in terms of representations or meaning. Leader defines our response as one of repulsion (that is, moving away from): (B) the idea of an empty space created by this failure (attraction).<sup>4</sup> Leader further argues that the 'zone' equates to a gap, saying:

*A network of signs makes a gap, and an artwork is generated from this gap. Beyond the work of art is a void that it is based on and evokes.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vidler, Anthony, *Warped Space*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001, p.236.

<sup>3</sup> The channelling of unacceptable impulses (e.g. sexual desire) toward a socially acceptable activity (e.g. creative).

<sup>4</sup> For Lacan the concepts of attraction and repulsion are linked to desire. The emptiness created by the failure of representation, language and the imagination to grasp this dimension becomes the space of our desires.

<sup>5</sup> Leader, Darian, *Stealing the Mona Lisa*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002, p.65.

He uses the example of a manufactured void, where the removal of an artwork from a wall creates an empty space. The artwork is replaced with a new one. This empty space did not exist before the display of the paintings; we produced the concept of empty space by the re-arrangement of objects. Leader relates the manufactured space to the spectator's perception of a fabricated construct within pictorial space. A painting of an image that depicts a fabricated space - for example, an empty architectural space constructed through the computer; creates a virtual space through the act of creation. Leader argues that in such depictions, the viewer is not presented with a representation of emptiness but rather he or she is confronted with a creation of emptiness.<sup>6</sup>

In order to navigate and comprehend such boundless abstract spaces, we instinctively define them through structures and systems that are linked to our understanding of real space. For example, in the virtual space of the Internet, we create web pages, sites, and links to endow the virtual with a structure in order to navigate our way around the illusionary net (web). Our dependence on previous systems of spatial organization is further illustrated by the fact that virtual reality environments rely heavily upon perspective to orientate the spectator. Perspective, in this instance, is fundamental to our understanding of the virtual space as representational space.<sup>7</sup> Image manipulation programs allow the seamless construction and deconstruction of space, aided by multiple layers that can be hidden, duplicated, re-organized, distorted, blended and 'zoomed' in and out.

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid* p.64.

<sup>7</sup> This is specific to western visuality.



Virtual space is a fabrication that is both shifting and ambiguous. This is reflected in contemporary computer-generated spaces and the Internet, spaces that we can never define through boundaries, nor even begin to grasp the true extent of its form. By giving the virtual form and appearance we can create a fabricated space that can be navigated to some degree despite its true limits remaining ambiguous. Hence the physical boundaries that define pictorial space hold possibilities for the representation of virtual space and its perception within the spectator beyond and through the pictorial illusion. Pictorial space offers concrete solutions to facilitating contact between the spectator's space and virtual space.

Central to the idea of virtual space is the duplicity apparent in mirrors and reflections. These are explored within the project as pictorial devices to lead the viewer to speculate and navigate the spatial ambiguities within pictorial space. The mirror and reflections mediate between the virtual and the real. In her book *The Mirror*, Sabine Melchior-Bonnet describes the space of the mirror as, 'Offering a virtual space for the encounter with the other – a fictive space in which an imaginary scenario is played out'.<sup>8</sup>

In his book *On Reflection*, Jonathan Miller makes the point that when mirrors are represented in paintings, the virtual space of the picture includes a second order of virtual space in the form of a painted reflection, and it is the viewer who projects the illusion of the mirror's reflection.<sup>9</sup> Therefore it can be argued that virtual spaces constructed within pictorial

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<sup>8</sup> Melchior-Bonnet, Sabine, *The Mirror: A History*. New York: Routledge, 2001, p.233.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, Jonathan, *On Reflection*. London: National Gallery, 1998, p.10.

spaces, are perceptually located within the spectator. Miller further argues that the virtual spaces of mirrors and reflections create a perceptual problem, providing misleading views, he says:

*We take it for granted that the 'virtual' view to be seen in a mirror is automatically distinguishable from the 'actual' view through a doorway or window, but the distinction requires cognitive work...It is hardly surprising that artists who deal in representational ambiguities, should have been attracted to the motive of the mirror, and exploited it in many different ways.<sup>10</sup>*

### **Defining Pictorial Space**

Virtual space is anonymous and brings into question clear distinctions between author and spectator. Conventional pictorial space on the other hand, has entirely different characteristics.

In his book *Virtual Art* Oliver Grau describes the characteristics of virtual space. He writes: 'in a virtual space, the parameters of time space can be modified at will, allowing the space to be used for modelling and experiment'.<sup>11</sup> In these terms virtual space is forever mobile, with its physical and psychological perception manifesting only through the sensorial experience of the spectator.<sup>12</sup> Pictorial space, in comparison, is static, with time and spatial dimensions suspended, or frozen. Pictorial space enquires

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid* p.12.

<sup>11</sup> Grau, Oliver, *Virtual Reality: From Illusion to Immersion*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2003, p.7.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid* p.XI.

time to be perceived and, hopefully, contemplated; however and the duration of these actions is governed by the spectator.

The concept of pictorial space originated during the Renaissance<sup>13</sup>. Ideas about perspectival space as they arose at this time, traditionally equated pictures as windows that separated the spectator from the image. However, what is overlooked in theoretical definitions of perspective is that pictorial space also manifests itself as a sensorial experience in the spectator. Spatial illusionism cannot be separated from the physical and tactile nature of the surface that delivers it.<sup>14</sup> The artist determines the physical boundaries of pictorial space.

### **The Spectator's Perception of Pictorial Space**

One of the project's main objectives is to locate the perception of both virtual and pictorial space within the viewer. The project regards the viewer as an active participant in making the image, emotionally, cognitively and physically. Key theories on spectatorship and visual perception by the writers Jacques Aumont, David Carrier and Jean-Pierre Oudart, have assisted with the development of conceptual and formal approaches to locating the spectator within the pictorial space.

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<sup>13</sup> The concept of pictorial space during the Renaissance led to the development of the principles of pictorial perspective.

<sup>14</sup> The term plane is also used more loosely to denote the flat surface within the image that is parallel to the picture plane (the extreme front edge of the imaginary space in the picture). Such planes are therefore both part of the surface of the picture and recede illusorily into deeper space (pictorial space).

In his book, *The Image* Aumont argues that our perception of pictorial space is almost never entirely visual, we understand and perceive its dimensions through the body:

*The idea of space is fundamentally linked to the body and its movement: vertically, especially, is a specific immediate given or experience via the perception of gravity...The concept of space is derived from tactile and kinetic data as from the visible.*<sup>15</sup>

Aumont points out that in order to locate ourselves in a space we need visual constants that do not vary, for example – the size of objects, forms, location, orientation and qualities of surface. If 'perceptual constancy' is altered, our recognition of a space becomes unstable and giddy.<sup>16</sup> The perceptual comprehension of pictorial space, which contains such anomalies, facilitates ambiguities and a destabilisation of the viewer's position in relation to the picture. Aumont makes the link between our perception of real space and the pictorial space of illusionism:

*To recognise something in an image is, at least in part, to identify what is seen in that image with what has been seen in or could be seen in reality.*<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, David Carrier argues that the viewer's place outside pictorial space is illustrated by visual anomalies and perceptual decisions that lead the viewer to negotiate multiple perspectival views. The postmodernist picture plane

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<sup>15</sup> Aumont, Jacques, *The Image*. London: British Film Institute, 1997, p.20.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid* p.21.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid* p.56.

establishes a more complex relationship between the viewer and the picture – ‘No single point is defined as the right viewpoint’.<sup>18</sup> Spatial anomalies generated within pictorial illusionism create pluralistic realities (other points of view) that question the depiction of the world from a single viewpoint. Carrier’s argument forms a parallel link to Aumont’s theory of navigating space through the body. If spatial anomalies within pictorial space are experienced as disorienting for the spectator, then it could be argued that this is also similar with representations of virtual space.

Theorist Jean-Pierre Oudart echoes Aumont’s analysis by stating that the psycho-perceptual relationship between the viewer and an illusionistic pictorial space is based on images operating as mediation between the spectator and reality. Oudart identifies two phenomena that relate the viewer to representational pictorial space:<sup>19</sup>

1. The effect of reality in representational painting is a spectator-centred variant. It is an effect of the spectator’s psychological reaction to what he or she sees.
2. The spectator infers a judgement of existence on a representational pictorial space and assigns it as a referent in actuality.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted by William V. Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991. p.222. From Carrier, David. ‘The Deconstruction of Perspective.’ *Arts Magazine*, no. 60 (Oct.). p.26-29.

<sup>19</sup> A representational pictorial space is one kind of value in which a picture relates to the real. Rudolf Arnheim identifies two other values in relating images to reality: Symbolic value and Sign value. See Arnheim, Rudolf, *Towards Psychology in Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

<sup>20</sup> Aumont, 1997. p. 80.

## Virtual Space through Architecture

Architectural interiors provide the means through which pictorial space and virtual space can be defined and constructed in a format that is familiar through their relationship to actual spaces. That is, architecture provides a recognisable structure as a point of intersection between the bodily and cognitive perceptions of pictorial space.

The nineteenth century architectural theorist August Schmarsow connected pictorial space to the space of architecture. Schmarsow defines pictorial space as psychological space into which the viewer can project their imaginations. He proposes that architectural space is an active bodily creation and perception, arguing 'our sense of space and spatial imagination press toward spatial creation; they seek their satisfaction in art'.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, architectural space can be defined as a product of subjective projection and introjection rather than a stable container consisting of walls, doorways and other architectural features. Schmarsow's theory of architectural space as a bodily creation, connects with Aumont's theories of pictorial perception as orientated through the body, therefore it should be possible to perceive the representation of virtual space through the body.

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted by Anthony Vidler. *Warped Space*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001. p.4. From original text by Mallgrave and Ikonomou, eds. *Empathy, Form, and Space*, pp. 286-287. From August Schmarow, "The Essence of Architectural Creation," first delivered as an inaugural address at the University of Leipzig, 8 November 1893. Published as *Das Wesen des architektonischen Schöpfung* (Leipzig: Karl. Hiersemann, 1894).

## Digital Imagination

Computers have created abstract and boundless spaces that are remote from the materiality of the actual world. These spaces, with little basis in actuality, bring focus to the role of the imagination in their construction.

Aumont surmises the Imaginary as demonstrating two notions of mental imagery:

*The imaginary is the domain of the imagination understood as a creative faculty, producing internal imagery, which may possibly be externalised. In practical terms, it is synonymous with 'fiction' and 'invention, and it is the opposite of the real. In this ordinary sense, the representational image depicts an imaginary world.'*<sup>22</sup>

Computer images are an implosion of image, reality, and the imaginary and are thereby non-referential.<sup>23</sup>

In his essay *Baroque Space*, David Bate argues that Photoshop<sup>24</sup> and other computer-based practices of representation are, without knowing it, precipitating a mutation of representational space.<sup>25</sup> Bates states that our modern culture, which is visually based on the photographic image, is potentially thrown into 'deception' when the indexical field of resemblance is disturbed by new capacities for illusion. Photoshop software allows the user to subvert

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<sup>22</sup> Aumont, 1997, p.85.

<sup>23</sup> Grau, 2003, p.248.

<sup>24</sup> Adobe Photoshop is a professional digital image editing software program. The program assists the user to explore numerous options using precision tools and special effects to create high quality images that can be output as digital prints.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.backspace.org/everything/e/hard/texts2/batebrock.html>

photography's indexical relation to the material world by re-cutting and rearranging fragments of actual space and placing them alongside computer generated constructs. Such construction can be further manipulated through a palette of tools and special effects.

### **Why Painting?**

Representational painting has historically been a means of exploring virtual space pictorially (the only one pre-photography). Painting is, by historical reference, authoritarian, that is, by painting something, it is given a different status.

The fabrication within representational painting is evident, the viewer is aware that the pictorial space is a construction that can only reference a likeness of real space. However, as a representation of a virtual space, painting is also a representation of its creation.

In his article, *The Self Pictured*, Gregory Galligan argues that one may read pictorial space as:

*A problematic mode of visual cognition where the painting achieves the status of an interactive foil for the spectator who traverses its path, in that it suggests that the spectator enter into a perceptual game.*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Galligan, Gregory, 'The self pictured: Manet, the mirror, and the occupation of realist painting', *The Art Bulletin*, March 1998 v80 il, p.138.



Ruth Ronen claims that pictures make better props for directing visual games and problems.<sup>27</sup> The virtuality of illusionary painting provides an experience of reality while not actually belonging to that reality. As Wendy Steiner notes in her book, *The Scandal of Pleasure*, painting allows us to 'be violated and still in control, to indulge in a certain taste for the sublime'.<sup>28</sup> In addition painting is also perpetual in that it exists beyond the moment. James Elkins writes:

*A painting is frozen, and its performance is very much unlike our evanescent ideas. That is one of painting's powers, since the stillness of painting can set the mind free in a remarkable way – paintings give us license to reflect in ways that volatile arts, such as movies and plays, cannot. A painting remains still, waiting for us to dream the changes it might possess.*<sup>29</sup>

This quality is at variance with virtual spaces that are never still or when they are, on a web page for example, it ceases to become a space of dimension. Another significant quality of painting is its materiality, texture, gradient and scale. The choices and decisions made during the process of painting can produce a variety of surfaces. This materiality makes the digitally created spaces physical and tactile and therefore different to the images viewed on screen or through print. The print and computer screen provide two texture gradients, surface and image, while the physical engagement with surface in painting is an integral part of the process. The potentially larger scale of paintings also physically locates

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.tau.ac.il/~rronen/documents/perspect.html>

<sup>28</sup> Steiner, Wendy, *The Scandal of Pleasure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. p.212.

<sup>29</sup> Elkins, James, *What Painting Is*, New York: Routledge, 1999. p.124.

the spectator within the pictorial space. Painting is both mind space and body space; it refers back to its own constituent materials, in which the material world is perceived through matter.

### **Background to the Project**

The contextual material to the project highlights significant representations of virtual space from the Renaissance through to Photo-Realism and digital imaging, tracing and highlighting attendant devices, structures and concepts that my investigation references. As background these readings were important to the development of the practical works.

The spatial anomalies that feature in the work throughout the project establish a dialogue about planes, space and illusionism through investigation of specific pictorial devices such as pictures within pictures and false vanishing points. These pictorial issues form a strong and conscious link to seventeenth century Dutch painting and the formal treatment of space reveals respective sympathies.

The multiple reflections employed by Photo-Realist painters Richard Estes and Don Eddy break down the picture surface into a more complex set of pictorial planes and fracture the internal logic of systematic spatial illusionism. Within the project investigations have also taken the path of increasing visual/compositional complexity and reflections were employed as a key device. This is evident in the paintings that fuse reality, motion and transient reflections - some 'actual,' some reflected in mirrors, some caught momentarily on tiles, through panes of glass, others overlapping actual

objects like ghostly apparitions. With such plays of transparencies the viewer looks into, on and/or through the pictorial plane.

I consider my work to share affiliations with some effects of trompe l'oeil painting. These include the life-size scale of the interiors and techniques of rendering relief and volume through the use of blending brushstrokes, a technique that dates back to the realistic rendering of fifteenth century Flemish painting. The 'more real than reality'<sup>30</sup> is often the effect aimed at with trompe-l'oeil painting, however, my work differs from trompe l'oeil in that the viewer's experience of my work, with its canvas stretcher depth, takes place in the context of the gallery.

Within the project the paintings compositional arrangements form an affinity with neo-baroque logic. This materialises through the play of forms, where the viewer can lose their bearings and space within the work depicts very little that permits the viewers to locate themselves. This disorientation also applies to the digital methodologies within my practice, where a mutation within virtual space is precipitated by the special effects of Photoshop.

A number of contemporary artists, such as James Casebere, Ben Johnson, David Ralph and Craig Kalpakjian, demonstrate a preoccupation with the representation of virtual space within pictorial illusionism. Their work deploys architectural modes of perception that have produced unique forms of spatial warping through which the viewer must navigate. These practices fuse painting and photography,

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<sup>30</sup> Milman, Miriam, *Trompe-l'oeil Painting*. Geneva: Albert Skira S.A, 1983. p. 36.

photography and digital imaging and digital imaging with painting.

### Previous Work

My art practice during undergraduate and honours studies was underpinned by a keen interest in the formal and conceptual aspects of pictorial illusionism within realist painting.<sup>31</sup> For the greater part of this period my work has utilised Photoshop software as a compositional tool, from early explorations through to more advanced levels of constructing images.



Figure 1



Figure 2

During Honours my work focused, predominately, on architecture as a format through which to explore representations of virtual space that extend the viewers' experience of being both spectator and participant within a rendered interior. Paintings, such as *Mirror Shadow* (2000) [figure 1], and *Green Room Red Room* (2000) [figure 2]

<sup>31</sup> This also relates directly to the fascination I have with oil paints materiality, its ability to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. This fascination has its roots in childhood, where I would look at the reproduction of paintings by artists referred to as 'Old Masters'. I was conscious that they were paintings, but somehow this reality was magical, it went beyond the photograph. Those paintings continue to inform my art practice.

centred on the inter-play of a person's actual/reflected shadow and delved into ideas of presence and absence. The architectural 'interior' depicted in painting has for a long time been of interest to me as a means of defining virtual space pictorially. The interior environment allows me to stage and orchestrate some of the pictorial elements within the painting (mirrors, reflections, shadows, light etc.). In addition, the manipulation of light, spatial depth, perspective and colour provides possibilities for amplifying the effects of a painting upon the viewers' perceptions of navigating the pictorial space. The interior constitutes a 'stage' for setting up a harmony between these formal elements of painting.



Figure 3

The subject of architecture as a means to investigate the virtual through pictorial space had not been considered in my work until the production of *Landing* (2000) [figure 3]. This picture enabled the exploration of a deeper pictorial space than in previous works. It depicted various rooms that ambiguously alluded to actual space and the virtual space of reflections in mirrors, through which the viewer could navigate. This work was significant in that it aimed to create

a sense of 'visual vertigo' in the viewer by distorting and manipulating architectural perspective through Photoshop. Furthermore, it generated ideas about exploring the relationship between the pictorial space and the viewer.

Work prior to the research project highlighted significant concerns of painting and digital imaging within my art practice and formed the foundation for a more extensive inquiry into the potential interaction of painting and digital imaging media in the conception of virtual space.

### **The Significance of the Project**

This research project brings together conceptual and formal concerns in order to find new approaches for the pictorial representation of virtual space. The main concerns have been as follows:

- The project's objective has been to make representations of virtual space within painting. It has approached this through the development of pictorial strategies for depicting within painting interior spaces that extend traditions of pictorial illusionism that inform its context.
- The project links traditional methods of painting to digital imaging art practices. It utilises digitally captured photographs and Photoshop software in the construction of the images, prior to painting. Therefore, the project adds to a developing body of knowledge within these areas of representation.

- The virtual space of the computer allows artists and viewers to create and engage space in ways that extend beyond the pictorial space.
- Architecture provides a recognizable format for the construction and navigation of virtual spaces in painting.

### **Major Development within the Project**

The main objective of the research was to find representation for virtual space through the employment of formal pictorial strategies in illusionistic painting. The aim was to create paintings that suggest that the pictorial space extends beyond the image to encompass both psychological and physiological dimensions. The project developed these objectives through three major stages.

#### **Phase 1**

Ideas concerning the use of reflective objects and surfaces as the means by which to consider spatial ambiguity, led to the development of intimate pictorial spaces with shallow depth. The framing of the images and the objects affected to some degree the viewer's reading of the space.

#### **Phase 2**

By creating spaces on a larger scale, which are defined pictorially through structures such as walls, floors and ceilings, the spectator enters the pictorial space,

perceptually, and through the body navigates the spatial anomalies.

### **Phase 3**

The reduction of architectural features within the pictorial space facilitated the perception of space extending beyond the pictorial frame. The large format and the removal of the ceiling were significant in suggesting a depicted space extending beyond the image. Opening up, rather than restricting the pictorial space, allowed for new possibilities in exploring the virtuality of space as defined by anomalies of light and reflection. A significant shift in the figure/ground relationship occurred through the manipulation of paint and through increasing the pictorial illusion of spatial depth and form.

### **Conclusion**

In this exegesis I have discussed ideas concerning pictorial illusion that have informed my project, outlining relevant historical and contemporary modes that emphasise the relationship between the pictorial space, virtual space and viewers' perceptual engagements.

The interiors depicted through painting are not meant to be a faithful copy of reality, but rather an expression of a broader condition – to manipulate the pictorial space in order to set up architectural anomalies that create a sense of spatial disorientation.



The aim of the research has been to develop paintings that offer pictorial representations of virtual space, transforming both architectural representations of pictorial space and the spectators' perceptions. This has significantly changed the way in which the pictorial space of painting might be read. In this project I have deployed architectural modes of perception that reference its digital production and reproduction.

## **Part 2 - context**

### **Introduction**

It is my intention in this section of the exegesis to trace those artists, both historical and contemporary, dealing directly with pictorial representations of virtual space and perspective. Investigations pursued throughout the project are grounded in the European traditions of illusory pictorial spaces particularly the perspectival illusions typically found in the work of seventeenth-century Dutch painters. My practice evokes architectural typologies that reference the work of Pieter Saenredam, Peter de Hooch and Carel Fabritius and also the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez - painters who, in their own epoch, constructed pictures that draw the spectator into the image, and establish an interactive viewing experience through the use of ambiguity, spatial anomalies, pictorial perspective and the interrelationship of planes. These works become, in this way, a point of mediation between vision and cognition. The refinement of painterly techniques that allowed these artists to depict spaces, rather than surfaces has led to the creation of virtual space. Discussions of these artists are placed within a broader context of developments within Western illusionistic pictorial systems from the Renaissance, through Baroque, Dutch painting, Photorealism and the changes brought about through digital imaging.

Issues related to contemporary representations of virtual space are considered, for the most part, through examination of image-making strategies employed by artists working across painting, photography and digital media. Richard

Estes, David Ralph, Ben Johnson, Craig Kalpakjian and James Casebere are discussed for their explorations into pictorial spatial illusions through focus on architectural constructs. Through examination of their artworks I aim to demonstrate that contemporary image making strategies that investigate the pictorial representations of virtual space, are inventively employing digital and photographic spatial constructions.

### **Renaissance illusion**

Pictorial space throughout much of the history of European painting has concentrated on resolving the issue of three-dimensional illusionism within two-dimensional space. To depict space and the illusion of depth, painters have used several methods of perspective. Leonardo da Vinci translated this into the metaphor of the window – a picture is a window that opens into another, different reality.<sup>1</sup> The most persistent methods of Renaissance perspective incorporate linear, aerial and/or colour perspective. In his treatise on painting of 1436, Leon Battista Alberti (c.1404-1472), described linear perspective as a ‘most delightful and noble art’.<sup>2</sup> And, until the invention of photography in 1826,<sup>3</sup> it continued to be so.

The Renaissance brought a renewed appreciation of the classical pictorial space of antiquity.<sup>4</sup> It marked the first time,

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<sup>1</sup> See James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*. Ithaca, New York: 1994. p.44.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966. p 40.

<sup>3</sup> Frenchman Joseph Nicéphore Niépce fixed the first photographic image in 1826. However, it was not until 1839 that a stable photographic image could be produced, when another Frenchman, named Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, published his new photographic process, the *daguerreotype*.

<sup>4</sup> Since its invention in the early Renaissance, linear perspective has bestowed the legacy of acquainting sympathetic and receptive cultures with the aesthetics of Greco-Roman art, and more specifically the art of fifth-century BC Athens. The

since that period, that painters placed the same importance on illusionistic pictorial space as they placed on subject matter. This aesthetic movement was advanced by the, then, recent northern refinement of oil painting by early fifteenth century Flemish painters. Oil paint was crucial to the development of pictorial illusionism because it was one of the most appropriate mediums for exploiting the full potential of the three types of perspective: linear, aerial and colour.<sup>5</sup>

Investigations into pictorial illusionism within oil painting reached new levels of visual virtuosity through innovative uses of linear and aerial perspective. The close observations made by the Dutch painter Jan van Eyck, (c.1390-1441), were central to these developments. In his meticulously rendered interior, *The Arnolfini Marriage* (1434), the artist utilises oil paint in ways that few painters could equal. Van Eyck enhanced the illusion of pictorial depth through layering transparent coloured glazes over opaque colours, a method that allows light to reflect, to the eye, back through the luminous surface.

The illusion of spatial depth, within van Eyck's paintings, is particularly interesting in relation to the fictive construction of the pictorial space. The *The Arnolfini Marriage* [figure 4] contains a number of perspectival inconsistencies that divert the viewers' focus, through the use of vanishing points, to

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Romans, who were the custodians of Greek art, imitated it and then, through experience, made it their own.

<sup>5</sup> All three are based on the observation of objects as they move away from the eye. In linear perspective, objects appear to diminish in size; in aerial perspective, they lose their outlines, contrasts, and details; in the perspective of colour they look progressively bluer and cooler. Together, all three types of perspective attempt to depict, in painting, the effect of the human eye's perception of the actual world of nature. It was Leonardo who defined the three types of perspective in his notebooks (volume 1, part 1). His book on perspective is now lost.



Figure 4

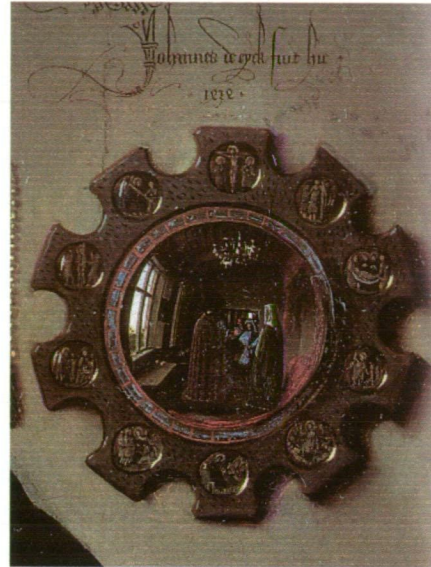


Figure 5

specific areas of the painting. For example, the vanishing point suggested by the ceiling, focuses the viewer's attention to the mirror near the middle of the composition. The mirror [figure 5], in turn, operates as a device to reflect what the spectator cannot see – the figure of the artist. In her book, *The Mirror*, author Sabine Melchior-Bonnet describes van Eyck's mirror device as,

*The mirror here is not an instrument of imitation, but rather both microscope and telescope, calling forth another reality within the closed space of the work. The invisible emerges from the visible, the infinitely large into the infinitely small in a mise en abîme ["placing in a void"] that reproduces the process of creation in which the painter, through his art participates.<sup>6</sup>*

Van Eyck's painting represents a virtual space that extends beyond the pictorial space and into the space of the viewer. It

<sup>6</sup> Melchior-Bonnet, Sabine, *The Mirror*. New York, 2001. p.122.

does this by representing the mirror as another virtual space. Van Eyck's mirror directs our attention to the actual' space in front of the picture plane, thus locating this perception of virtual space within the viewer, physically and cognitively.

### **Baroque Speculative Spaces**

The baroque obsession with pictorial illusionism pushed painters to search for new representations of virtual space that challenged what had been upheld as Renaissance illusion.<sup>7</sup> The 'perspective box' framing a painting's entire scene of the Renaissance, now depicted interior spaces that appear to continue indefinitely sideways and beyond the boundaries of the canvas. Baroque painting restructured the unified view and space-defining box of Renaissance illusion by integrating foreshortening, multiple viewpoints and diagonals in conjunction with linear and aerial perspective, creating an even greater illusion of spatial depth. Furthermore, the Baroque linked architecture, painting and sculpture through illusionism, light, colour and a sense of movement with the intention of manipulating the emotions of the viewer.

The spatial fictions within the work of mid-seventeenth century Spanish and Netherlandish painters exemplify what French philosopher Michel Foucault described as an age of *trompe l'oeil* painting. It was also the age of the play that duplicates itself by representing another play; an age of the deceiving senses.<sup>8</sup> It is these features that I find fascinating in the work *Las Meniñas* (The Maids of Honour), painted in

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<sup>7</sup> Dunning, William V., *Changing Images of Pictorial Space*. Syracuse, New York 1991. p.95.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things*. London: Tavistock, 1980, p.36



1656, by Spanish artist Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) [figure 6].



Figure 6

Perhaps no other work has had more interpretive discussions surrounding it than *Las Meniñas*. Although the work contains no trace of the optical trickery associated with trompe l'oeil illusion,<sup>9</sup> it is nevertheless a superlative example of a

<sup>9</sup> I viewed *Las Meniñas* some years ago while visiting the Prado. It is a large painting and from the distance of the room's entrance appears slick in the rendering of paint. However, approaching the work, I not only fully realised the life size scale of the figures within the painting, but I noticed that *Las Meniñas* was executed with loose brushstrokes that exerted a great economy of paint. A large mirror located opposite on the gallery wall, in which you saw the reflection of *Las Meniñas*, further enhanced the experience of viewing the work. The actual mirror placed within the room was spatially rather interesting, giving the work a further edge akin to trompe l'oeil realism.

baroque spatial fiction that represents the virtual through the construction of the pictorial space. *Las Meniñas* not only challenges the viewer's perceptual reading of the pictorial space, but also their ability to locate themselves in relation to it. The composition establishes an ambiguous relationship between the content (figures, mirror and reflection, interior architecture, props.), the picture's perspective and the viewer; and this destabilises the viewer's position in relation to the painting. The compositional mix of actuality and reflections, the sense of both presence and absence leaves spatial relationships open to speculation. It is this very point that makes *Las Meniñas* so fascinating. The presentation of spatial clues in *Las Meniñas* sets up spatial conundrums that evoke speculative responses within the viewer.

Among the extensive writing on the ambiguous spatiality of *Las Meniñas* Joel Snyder's interpretation is the most interesting in relation to my project. Snyder's discussion focuses on the work's perspective structure and how it relates to both illusionism within the work and apprehension by the viewer:

*Velázquez has done much in Las Meniñas to divert our understanding of what we are seeing: he has supplied a set of clues that enchant us into believing what is shown, have grasped the truth of the presentation. I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong with the way the room and its figures are presented to us. On the contrary every thing is in perfect order. There is nothing illusionary in the presentation – and yet, an illusion is in fact*



*created. But this illusion is not in the painting; it is in us, and it is the illusion of understanding.*<sup>10</sup>

Snyder's assessment upholds Jacques Aumont's analysis of the conditions in which pictorial illusion operates. Aumont states that illusion can take place under two conditions: (a) A perceptual condition, where the eye is unable to differentiate between two or more percepts. Aumont uses cinema as an example, where the eye cannot distinguish real movement from apparent movement. (b) A psychological condition, where the viewer faces a complex spatial scene. Our visual system attempts to interpret what it perceives when it offers a plausible interpretation of the viewed scene. According to Aumont a pictorial illusion such as *Las Meniñas* depends largely on the psychological perceptions of the viewer and their expectations.

Snyder points out that Velázquez supports an apparent illusion by placing objects (i.e. the mirror and the back of the depicted canvas) in specific locations within the scene, as well as framing the scene so the viewer can only speculate the spatial perspective [figures 7,8,9 and 10].<sup>11</sup> The framing of the scene and the placement of key objects, together with the use of multiple vanishing points, are also important in influencing the viewer's perception of virtual space.

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<sup>10</sup> Snyder, Joel, 'Las Meniñas and the Mirror of the Prince'. *Critical Inquiry* 2 #4 (1985). p.552.

<sup>11</sup> In fig. 1 Snyder locates the vanishing point as *p*. The mirror would therefore reflect that which is located at point *c*, the royal couple's painted image on the canvas. It is the vanishing point that is off centre. Velázquez's framing of the scene and the position of the canvas makes us oblivious to the unseeable left wall of the room. Fig. 2 is a schematic outline of the room in *Las Meniñas*. In fig. 3 and fig. 4 Snyder 'reveals' the left wall hidden by the canvas and the paintings 'framing'.

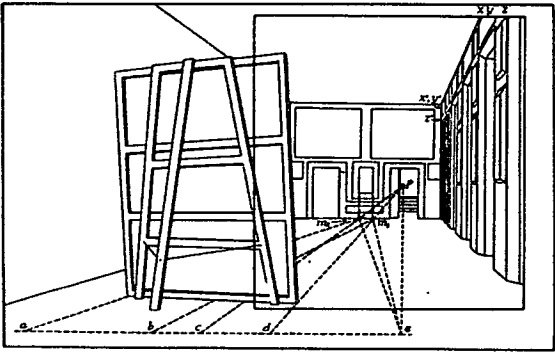


Figure 7

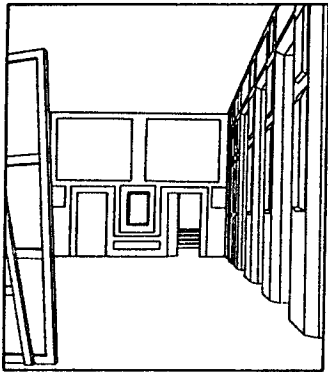


Figure 8

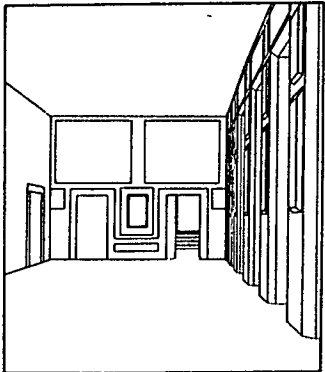


Figure 9

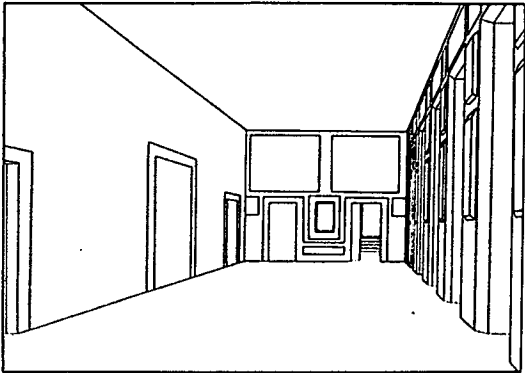


Figure 10

Echoing Snyder’s observations, James Elkins suggests, in his book *The Poetics of Perspective*, that viewers’ are especially drawn to optical puzzles, paradoxes and ambiguities within paintings such as *Las Meniñas*. He writes: ‘Our generation reads more meaning into positions and “states” of the viewer, gazes, mirrors, reflected and refracted

seeing, and their permutations than past generations seem to have.'<sup>12</sup>

It would be fair to say that my experience of viewing *Las Meniñas* 'in the flesh' is now 'coloured' by the various interpretations I have read. The spatial conundrums inherent in Velázquez's *Las Meniñas* inform similar concerns in the research project where spatial ordering within the painting plays a pivotal role in affecting the viewer's reading and perceptual navigation of a virtual space.

### **Golden Age of Pictorial Illusion - Science and Observation**

Fascination with perspective and pictorial illusion increased sharply during the seventeenth-century and led to a Golden Age in Dutch realism. The relationship between painting and science grew particularly in the Netherlands. Within the field of optics the development of the camera obscura allowed artists to project a scene directly onto a canvas.

It has been widely written that the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675; Delft) utilised the camera obscura as a compositional aid to image construction. There is debate over whether Vermeer did actually use the instrument, as there is however no historical documentation proving he did.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, scholars like Philip Steadman, amongst others, have gone to tremendous effort, through practical experiments and research, to prove that Vermeer experimented with the then new technology. Steadman argues that the artist's use of the device was influential in the

<sup>12</sup> Elkins, James, *The Poetics of Perspective*. Ithaca, New York: Routledge, 1994. p.118.

<sup>13</sup> See Delsaute, Jean-Luc, 'The Camera Obscura and Painting in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Vermeer Studies*. Washington 1998, p.111

development of his style and choice of subject matter.<sup>14</sup> Most obvious are the distortions in the artist's paintings that concur with distortions produced by lenses [figure 11]. Vermeer was not appreciated in his own day as he is now and it is conceivable that one of the reasons may be the unfamiliarity of the representation of camera-conditioned space and the optical effects created by the camera obscura in rendering form, colour and texture. At present the reverse is true: human perception now relies not only on photographic images but also computer-generated images.



Figure 11

<sup>14</sup> A further and more comprehensive discussion can be found in Philip, *Vermeer's Camera*. Oxford 2001.

## Still Life Painting – Framing a Shallow Pictorial Space

In the Netherlands the new sceptical science of the time was visual, being based on observation rather than received ideas. As Umberto Eco has noted, the shift from 'the essence to the appearance of architectural and pictorial products' is indicative 'of a new scientific awareness'.<sup>15</sup> Perspective provided artists a more exacting system for ordering spatial illusions and, extending further, methodical investigations into appearances.

The emergence of still life as the most 'specialised' branch of Dutch painting represented the experiential observation of the detached scientific eye. There were also significant schools of still life painting in Spain and to a lesser extent in Italy and France. Practitioners of the genre would often restrict themselves to a single range of objects (specifically symbolic objects) in order to experiment with particular formal painting problems - harmonies of shapes, colours, textures, reflections and transparencies. However, the essential feature of the still life format is the placement of objects close to the front of the picture plane in a manner that utilises low vantage points and close-up views. The framing of the objects within confined spaces of limited pictorial depth (the backdrop of a wall or dark void, for instance) focus attention within the picture and discourages the viewer from speculating on what exists beyond the limits of the frame; a feature that is further accentuated by a unified light heralding from no external source.

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<sup>15</sup> Eco, Umberto, 'The Poetics of the Open Work', in *Twentieth Century Studies*, No 12, December 1974, p.17.



Figure 12

By contrast Sébastien Stoskopff's (1596-1657) painting *Still Life with a Calf's Head* (1640), the light enters the picture from the left side [figure 12]. The use of light in this way assists the viewer in 'reading' the composition through the European convention of reading text from left to right. The light source represents an important shift in the way the viewer interacts with the pictorial space. It lies unseen beyond the picture frame, ambiguously indicated by the reflection, within the glass spheres, of a window. However, although the spatial intention of still life painting is to discourage the viewer from speculating on the space beyond the picture plane, it is the reflections and shallow pictorial depth depicting dark spatial voids that appear to encourage such speculation.

## **Perspective and illusion: The works of Saenredam, de Hooch and Fabritius**

Pictorial spatial conundrums featured in many seventeenth century Dutch paintings of interiors. Depictions of this kind displayed a fascinating array of enigmatic curiosities and complexities. Painters employed unusual and inventive depictions of secondary scenes, introducing views through archways, open doors, pulled back curtains, or mirrors. Such works contain pictures within pictures, depicted both literally and in terms of the compositional structure where the pictorial space is divided into compartments of pictures. However, in contextual terms, what I find the most intriguing feature of these paintings, is the ambience generated within the pictorial space through the precise rendering of texture, colour and form within both domestic and church interiors.

The artist, Pieter Saenredam (1597-1665; Haarlem), painted highly illusionistic interiors of local churches. Trained in architecture, he was less interested in looking at the relics of classical antiquity than at the buildings in his immediate environment. His interiors are notable for their variation from the more natural view of an oblique angle<sup>16</sup> favoured by most painters active in Delft at the time, for example, Emanuel De Witte's *The Old Church at Delft* [figure13]. Saenredam would, instead, frequently select viewpoints that included a large area of the church and that located the walls parallel to the picture plane. His paintings are based on preliminary drawings produced on site and also on detailed construction drawings, made back in his studio from measurements

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<sup>16</sup> In nature, subjects are rarely organised on a strict geometric grid. In pictorial perspective, subjects that are projected at an oblique angle (not a right angle) to the picture plane reflect the way objects are seen in the real world.



recorded with the aid of straight edges and compasses. Despite the stylistic realism of his paintings, Saenredam often shifted and altered forms for compositional reasons.



Figure 13

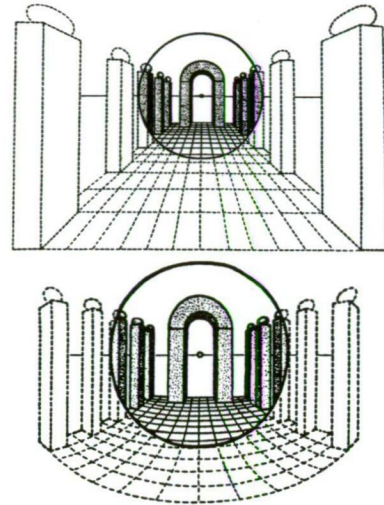


Figure 14

The spatial irregularities that exist within Saenredam's work are informative of his methodologies. The reliability of realism,<sup>17</sup> within his paintings, is linked to Saenredam's use of perspective in a manner that contravened the conventions of one point perspective. He did not depict the space from a single fixed point, but rather, as if viewing with both eyes. This results in an effect known as 'curvilinear perspective' [figure 14].<sup>18</sup>

In the work *The nave of the Mariakerk seen to the west* (1636), shifts in perspective are evident where different sides of the columns show slightly different viewpoints [figure 15]. It appears Saenredam would move to observe certain features better, or take a break and return to a different

<sup>17</sup> By 'reliability of realism' I refer to how faithful to life Saenredam's church views are, and to what degree did he use artistic effect in depicting these scenes.

<sup>18</sup> See Elkins, James, *The Poetics of Perspective*. London 1994, p.182-216.



position from which to draw or take measurements.<sup>19</sup> These shifts affected the perspectival reliability of Saenredam's representation of space, but as the Architectural Historian, Arie de Groot points out 'Perspectively correct is not the same as convincing, and vice versa.'<sup>20</sup>



Figure 15

Other modifications Saenredam made were quite intentional. Incorporating floor tiles into the picture was an important aid in measuring distances when constructing the perspective. Saenredam also idealised the space by removing details and smoothing out irregularities in perspective. This was achieved through combining viewpoints, however, it produced spatial inconsistencies that were confusing to perspectival conventions for viewing pictorial space.

The depiction of interior spaces, that were consistent with reality, was a central problem to Saenredam and other painters. Carel Fabritius (1622-1654) attempted to create the most vivid pictorial illusions possible, for example *The*

<sup>19</sup> De Groot, Arie, *Pieter Saenredam*, Utrecht 2001, p.38.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid* p.48.

*Goldfinch* (1654) [figure 16]. What I find particularly interesting in the work of Fabritius is his experiments with linear perspective.



Figure 16



Figure 17

Only a single painting by Fabritius now exists to showcase his interest in linear perspectival illusions. The painting in question, *View of Delft* (1652), has a strange but wonderful warp in the perspective of the receding background [figure 17]. Equally compelling is the space in the left-hand foreground of the painting, in which the musician sits close to the picture plane seemingly extending into the viewer's space. This area, also interestingly, cuts right through the picture plane vertically. It is not known why Fabritius included such a distortion, but it has been suggested that the painting, which measures only 15 by 32 centimetres, may, originally, have formed the back wall of a peep-box.<sup>21</sup> When viewing *View of Delft* there is a strong feeling of being unsteadily anchored to the left section of the painting; the pictorial distortion enhances the viewer's spatial disorientation.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel van Hoogstraten's peep-box in the National Gallery in London offers an indication of what Fabritius's perspective paintings must have been like. See David Bomford, "Perspective, Anamorphosis, and Illusion: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Peep Shows" in *Vermeer Studies*, Ed. Gaskell, Ivan, and Jonker, Micheal, Washington 1998.



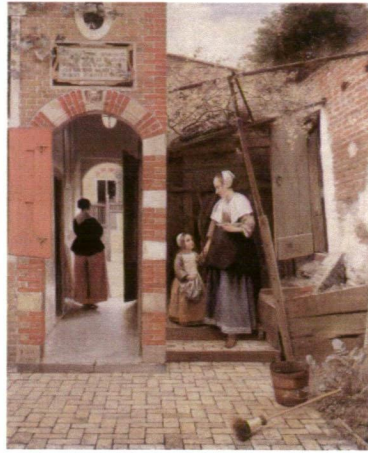


Figure 18

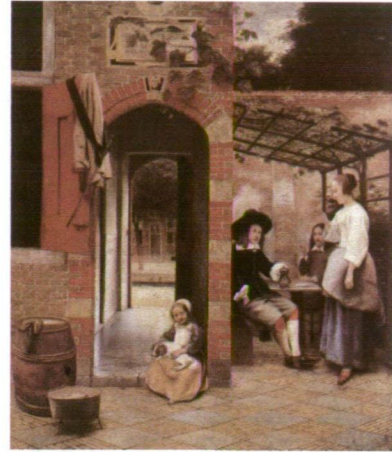


Figure 19

Producers of peep-boxes and trompe l'oeil effect paintings were not the only artists in the Delft circle to be interested in the effects of spatial illusion and perspective. For example, Pieter de Hooch (1629-1684) strived to depict interior space as illusionistically possible. A pictorial device favoured by De Hooch was that of secondary scenes and his compositions often include open doors or glimpses through a window to reveal a deep and distant space. These openings invite the viewer to journey down corridors, through numerous rooms and then outside into exterior spaces. De Hooch's complex use of secondary scenes creates spatial definition that is somehow both ambiguous and disjointed. The spatial ambiguity that operates in De Hooch's work is strengthened by the fictitious nature of the pictures' construction, an observation confirmed in his painting *Courtyard of a House in Delft* (1658) [figures 18 and 19]. In both versions of the painting, De Hooch has used the same porch archway while altering architectural features, such as floors and doorways, for compositional reasons.<sup>22</sup> According to Brian Jay Wolf, De Hooch seizes upon dramas domestic ideology, as a way of

<sup>22</sup> Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr., *Dutch Paintings Of The Seventeenth Century*. New York 1995, p.138

localising larger anxieties, 'domestic scenes stage cognitive dramas; architectural tropes elaborate psychological spaces; and the imagery of mirrors, windows and vistas invoke a thematics of seeing.'<sup>23</sup>

The historical examples I have presented of architectural image spaces for creating illusions are not, obviously, technically comparable with the pictorial illusions now possible with the aid of photography and computers. However, I have shown how, in seventeenth-century Dutch painting, extraordinary efforts were made to produce maximum illusion with the technical means at hand.

### **Photo-Realism**

Photography had a tremendous influence on the painters of the late nineteenth century. From the art academia to the salon rebels, a large number took or worked from photographs.<sup>24</sup> This invention brought about the most radical change in the perception and depiction of space since the rediscovery of classical pictorial space in the Quattrocento of the Renaissance. It altered the way people looked at and thought about nature.<sup>25</sup> Photography not only gave painters a new means for describing space but also enabled them to study objects and images in different ways.

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<sup>23</sup> Wolf, Brian Jay, *Vermeer and the Invention of Seeing*. Chicago 2001. p.74

<sup>24</sup> French realists

<sup>25</sup> Salvador Dali expressed this idea when he wrote, "To look is to think" (50 *Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship*), trans. Haakon M. Chevalier [reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1992], 26). Leonardo voiced a similar thought in his proof that painting was superior to all the other arts. "It is the sense of sight through which mankind primarily and profoundly perceives nature." (*Leonardo on Painting*, trans. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989.

The highly rendered surfaces of Photo-Realism may appear as a return to an illusion of the Renaissance; however, Photo-Realist painters were not interested in rendering space, but rather, the photograph. To them photographs are simply flat images for use on flat planes. While it was not the first time that artists had used photography as a technical device in painting, Photo-Realist painters used it for different outcomes.

Most of the Photo-Realists slide-project a photograph onto the canvas or alternatively use a grid system. Both these methods of transferring the image information to the canvas link Photo-Realist painting strategies to those of Vermeer and the German painter Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528).<sup>26</sup> The Photo-Realist's preference for complex spatial reflections, pictures within pictures creates highly speculative spaces, similar to seventeenth century Dutch interior painting, where the viewer's eye is always moving over the picture plane. It is interesting to note that artists from both periods depict everyday life, culture and lifestyle.

In the book *Changing Images of Pictorial Space*, William V. Dunning makes the observation that Photo-Realist paintings of flat photographs contain multiple illusions on a flat surface – a painting of a photograph that depicts reflections in a plate glass window, as in Don Eddy's *G-III* [figure 20]. Many Photo-Realists chose to paint reflective surfaces that contained their own illusions, thus creating 'an illusion within

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<sup>26</sup> Dürer wrote numerous manuscripts describing the perspective window, a mechanical device used by artists to view a subject through a framed grid. Artists could then transfer the details of the subject with the aid of a corresponding grid drawn on the support. See Elkins 1994, p.49.

an illusion within an illusion'<sup>27</sup> - the painting, photograph, reflections. Dunning raises the question of what we see when we look at a Photo-realist painting - a painted illusion, a photographic illusion, or a reflected illusion?



Figure 20

### Richard Estes

The Photo Realist painter Richard Estes is an artist whose work I admire for a number of reasons. I am drawn to the smooth surfaces and pictorial depth the artist achieves in his works. His rendering of reflections and translucency within urban architectural environments holds great visual appeal on an aesthetic level, but also in terms of technical finesse. I also find appealing, and relevant in terms of my own practice, those painting's of Estes's that employ a complex dialogue of both reflections and multiple perspectives.

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<sup>27</sup> Dunning, William V., *Changing Images of Pictorial Space*. New York 1991, p.206

These pictorial complexities are a product of Estes's subject matter, that is the large areas of glass and reflective surfaces. In his article 'Thin Film', Tim Griffin makes the point that building exteriors have become more animated<sup>28</sup> in the refinement and diversification of transparency and translucency, allowing the passer-by to see variously forward and backward, interior and exterior.<sup>29</sup> Griffin's comments are relevant to Estes who is attempting to create spatial duplicity on a two-dimensional surface. Also of interest in the development of the project are Estes's construction methodologies. Estes's pictures are composed from taking several photographs of the subject at slightly different viewpoints. From these photographs Estes produces a painting that contains multiple viewpoints. He applies deliberately inaccurate perspective, thus falsifying the information obtained by the camera.

Estes is well aware of the limitations of traditional perspective systems and therefore chooses to employ a number of vanishing points in his paintings with the intention to approximate the effect of our eyes viewing a scene or object. The eye according to Estes is obliged to scan and travel around and over a multitude of things rather than focusing on a single vanishing point.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Griffin, Tim, "Thin Film, translucency and transparency in contemporary art", *Arttext*, Issue 74, August-October, 2001, p.32. Griffin uses the example of store walls that turn from opaque to transparent when viewed from different angles.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Arthur, J., *Richard Estes: The Urban Landscape*, catalogue and interview, Canada, J., Museum of Fine Arts. Boston 1978, p.38





Figure 21

In his painting *Central Savings* (1975), the viewer can see into a space and through a seemingly transparent glass window to the sharp perspectival recessions of the street [figure 21]. For me, this glass window holds great visual interest, because it encompasses the duality of both surface and illusion. Estes orchestrates multiple and accentuated recessions, and gleaming, smooth surfaces that seal reality into seamless appearances.<sup>31</sup>

In her essay *Richard Estes and the Contemporary American Realists*, Virginia Bonito makes comparison between Estes' picture surface and the 'push/pull' space of the American Modernist painter Hans Hoffman.<sup>32</sup> In Hoffman's painterly abstractions the "push/pull" effect is characterised by the

<sup>31</sup> Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*. London 1996, p.141

<sup>32</sup> Hoffman received a rigorous academic European training. He was ultimately influenced by Fauvism and Cubism and sought to activate the picture surface by exploring the relationship between form, space, colour and line. For him, visual tension was of great importance.



rushes and halts of multiple picture planes.<sup>33</sup> Bonito comments further that Estes's fragmented views and vigorous architectural perspectives as being reinvented from the vocabulary of Futurism and Cubism.<sup>34</sup> I feel Estes's expressions of space and movement within the dense, late 20th century, urban environment are also perhaps somewhat quieter visually than both Futurism and Cubism, akin to the stillness of many historical Dutch scenes like those I have mentioned. Unlike Futurist pictures there is very little indication of movement in his painting and his cityscapes always seem deserted. Yet I agree Estes' paintings' extend the inventiveness and imagination of the Cubists and the Futurists who began to explore the visualization of fast-paced 'modernism'. Interestingly, Robert Rosenblum notes that it is an essential aspect of Cubism to deny a single definition of reality, and to replace it with multiple interpretations and the intention to confound.<sup>35</sup> Notwithstanding Rosenblum's observations, the simultaneous revelation of more than one aspect of an object, in an effort to express its total three dimensionality, was a primary aim of Analytical Cubism; as was the dissolution of figure and ground and the consequent shifting relations between surface and depth. Within many works produced under Analytical Cubism there is a spatial contradiction between the positioning of one single plane and its relation to the surface.<sup>36</sup> To expand this point further, in Analytical Cubism the concept of simultaneity (the fourth dimension) replaced the static, systematic representation of depth achieved through perspective. As John Canaday put it, 'The fourth dimension is movement in depth, or time, or

<sup>33</sup> [www.artregister.com/SeavesIntroductiontoCollection/Catalogue/EstesEssay.html](http://www.artregister.com/SeavesIntroductiontoCollection/Catalogue/EstesEssay.html).

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

<sup>35</sup> Rosenblum, Robert, *Cubism and Twentieth Century Art*. Prentice-Hall and Abrams 1982, p67

<sup>36</sup> Golding, John, "Cubism", *Concepts of Modern Art*, Ed. Nikos Stangos, London 1985, p.57-62

space-time, by the simultaneous presentation of multiple aspects of an object'.<sup>37</sup> Simultaneity is expressed by the breakdown of forms into large facets of planes that represent the items seen from different vantage points - the planes, some opaque, some transparent – cross overlap and merge. In Estes' painting, *Central Savings*, these converging pictorial planes manifest in reflections that create spatial duality on a flat canvas.

The pictorial intention of the kind pursued in my investigation can perhaps be viewed, as a logical successor to the discourse of modernism on the nature of pictorial space as a representation of virtual space. The attempt by Estes to push the boundaries of pictorial illusion through devices such as the hyper-articulation<sup>38</sup> of reflection, transparency and focus has enlightened my investigation in relation to spatial ambiguities and representational illusionism. The relationship between surface and pictorial depth operating in Estes' paintings coincides with the figure ground issues explored within this project; these which I shall discuss in the following studio chapter.

### Digital Investigations

Contemporary investigations into pictorial illusionism have focused on possibilities within current technology, specifically digital imaging technologies. Software such as Photoshop provides for painters and photographers an almost unlimited capacity to manipulate two-dimensional images. Architectural

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<sup>37</sup> Canaday, John, *Mainstreams of Modern Art*. Holt, Reinhart, Wilson 1959, p458

<sup>38</sup> It is important to distinguish my 'hyper' articulation of space and reflection from that of "hyper-realism" which is associated with photographic realism. I believe this hyperrealist approach to objects that is predominant in the majority of Photo-realism, lacks any emotional intensity, which is important to my work.

design that arises through the assistance of digital manipulations enables hitherto unimaginable complexity. With the mechanics of the design process now digitally linked to that of the fabrication process (and here I include painting), these new possibilities revolutionise the mode of production itself. However while this is the case, little has changed in the framing of pictorial space. Perspective is still the rule conditioning virtual reality environments.<sup>39</sup>

The digital manipulations of pictorial space, by contemporary artists, participate in the geographical<sup>40</sup> deconstruction of space by blurring the boundaries between interior and exterior, past and present and altering the way the viewer experiences and understand pictorial space. This shift in the understanding of perspective and spatial relationships informs contemporary artists exploring illusionistic pictorial space; in a similar way the discovery of linear perspective affected Renaissance painters and the multiple perspectives for the cubist artists. In his article *The Work of Theory in the Age of Digital Transformation* Henry Jenkins argues that the computer reworks Renaissance perspective by offering a 'virtual play-scape' that de-familiarises painting, opening it up to re-examination.<sup>41</sup>

Contemporary exhibitions such as *Out of Site* (New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York 2002) have taken fictional architecture as a premise and it focuses on artists who use architectural constructs to explore the ways in which digital technologies have impacted representations and articulations of pictorial space. Associate curator Anne Ellegood describes

<sup>39</sup> Vidler, Anthony, *Warped Space*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press 2001. p.7

<sup>40</sup> By geographical I mean the arrangement of constituent parts within an architectural environment.

<sup>41</sup> <http://web.mit.edu/21fms/www/faculty/henry3/pub/digitaltheory.htm>

the spaces depicted in *Out of Site* as manifestations of real navigations of space yet the sites are marked by skewed and multiple perspective, compressed space, morphing geometry, rotating scale, layered topography, unexpected hybridity and immersive environments.<sup>42</sup>

### Contemporary Neo-Baroque

Recent digital manipulations of illusionistic pictorial space identify with a neo-baroque vision. Unlike classically ordered space, neo-baroque vision loses its sense of centre. Angela Ndalians describes how the single point perspective of classicism gives way to multi-point perspective in a neo-baroque space:

*Rather the centre is now to be found in the position of the spectator, with the representational centre changing depending on the spectator's focus. Given that the neo-baroque spectacle provides polycentric and multiple shifting centres, the spectator, in a sense, remains the only element in the image/viewer scenario that remains centred and stable.*<sup>43</sup>

The continual multiplication of the centre (with its multiple perspectives) creates a spatial disorientation for the viewer. In her article *Entertainment Media*, Ndalians states that the illusion (within neo-baroque) is ordered by the spectator's active engagement with the image. The convention of the passive spectator as voyeur collapses when the viewer is immersed in a spectacle aimed at perceptually removing the

<sup>42</sup> [www.newmuseum.org/more\\_exh\\_out\\_site.php](http://www.newmuseum.org/more_exh_out_site.php).

<sup>43</sup> Ndalians, A., *Architectures of Vision: Neo-Baroque Optical Regimes and Contemporary Entertainment Media*. MIT Conference Papers 1999, p.1

presence of the frame. The collapse of the frame is a baroque formal principle that allows greater flow between what is inside and outside of the painting.

### David Ralph and Ben Johnson

Spatial theorist Siegfried Kracuer described the modern hotel lobby as a space in which the modern urban dweller can bear witness to his non-existence, detached from everyday life, hotel guests like atoms in a void are confronted with nothing. For Krauer the hotel lobby is the ultimate space of alienation.<sup>44</sup> The ambience within the work of David Ralph and Ben Johnson expresses the potential of space to act as an emblem of social estrangement as described by Kracuer.

Building upon Estes' strategies that place the photograph central to painting, Melbourne-based painter David Ralph and British painter Ben Johnson also use architecture as a formal subject in their work. Like Estes, Ralph and Johnson paint the urban landscape, although not the exterior architecture and city streets, but rather, the minimal architectural environment of corporate interiors.

The style and technique of Ralph's work seamlessly connect formalist photography and Photo-realist painting, while mimicking the smooth and invisible workings of modern office interiors. James Moss describes Ralph's paintings *Slippery slope* (1999) [figure 22] and *Triforium* (1999) [figure 23], as 'dreamscape settings of a corporate noir'.<sup>45</sup> The mood

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<sup>44</sup> Vidler, Anthony 2001

<sup>45</sup> Moss, James, 'The World Is Not Enough', *Samstag 2000*, catalogue essay, Samstag Program – University of South Australia, 2000, p5

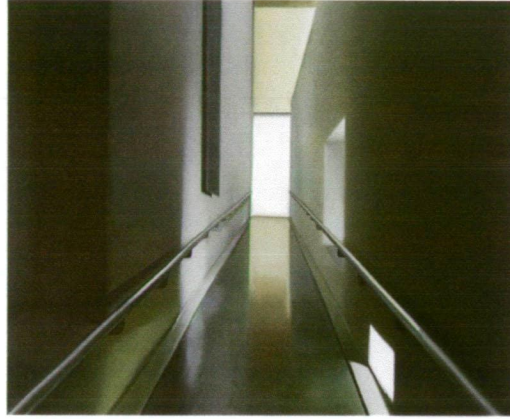


Figure 22



Figure 23

realism, Ralph achieves, is enhanced through the artists' use of a minimal palette and the colours and tones that mimic artificial lighting.

Ralph says his paintings are fictitious interiors, which operate as spatial metaphors for the human spirit.<sup>46</sup> This psychological intention is explored through design influence by modernism that leans toward abstraction, in order, according to Ralph, to sever ties to any form or natural, culturally symbolic or religious detail in architecture.<sup>47</sup>

Another artist whose images drift between realism and an abstraction of pictorial space is Ben Johnson. The painting *Below the Surface* (2001) [figure 24], from Johnson's *Still Time* series of works, is stylistically reminiscent of David Ralph's minimal spaces. Like Ralph, Johnson paints architecture. However, according to Edward Lucie-Smith, the real purpose of the work is to clothe an abstract design with apparently realistic features.<sup>48</sup> Lucie-Smith argues that

<sup>46</sup> Sebastian Contemporary Realist Painting, exhibition catalogue 2000, p.19

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*

<sup>48</sup> Lucie-Smith, Edward, *Art Today*. London: Phaidon, 1995, p.241.

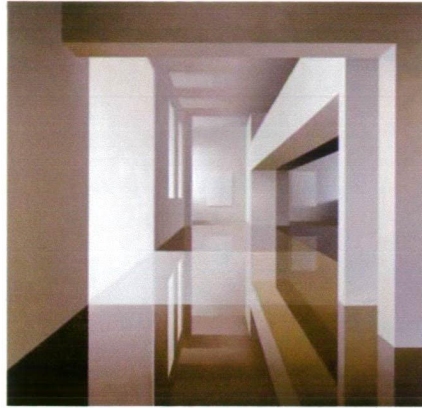


Figure 24



Figure 25

paintings such as Johnson's *The Token Space* (1990) [figure 25]:

*maintain a careful balance between naturalism and classicism, because it is possible to read the depiction as something entirely naturalistic, which is a direct reflection of observed reality – and miss the other implications of the image – that of the classical core inherent in the work.*<sup>49</sup>

Johnson's paintings are concerned with meticulously recreating the experience of architectural interiors. However, I am especially interested in the methodologies employed by Johnson to achieve this. In constructing a blue print for a painting, Johnson will produce numerous photographs of an actual space. From these photographs he constructs a computer model, which allows him to explore the space on-screen and to find what he considers to be the ideal viewpoint.<sup>50</sup> The final construction drawing is in fact a compilation of different viewpoints and these form the basis of his smoothly rendered paintings. Like Estes, Johnson's

<sup>49</sup> *ibid* p.241

<sup>50</sup> Patrick, Keith, *Oil on Canvas*. London: BBC Publishing, 1997, p.24



fascination with reflection is shown in the polished floors he depicts. In these, rectangular fluorescent/ceiling lights are reflected. Likewise the grid of floor tiles contains the wobbling contours of light reflections that create the strange sense of looking up rather than down.

### **Craig Kalpakjian**

With the pre-eminence of photography in contemporary art, it is no surprise that digital cameras and imaging software play a major role in forging new ground in pictorial representation.

Although Craig Kalpakjian does not produce images through paint media, he does, like Johnson, explore architectural constructs through the computer. Kalpakjian's digital photographic interiors of corporate office buildings offer new possibilities in exploring pictorial space and the psychology of space. He explores perceptions of reality using images of interiors and the architectural fixtures that form their parameters.

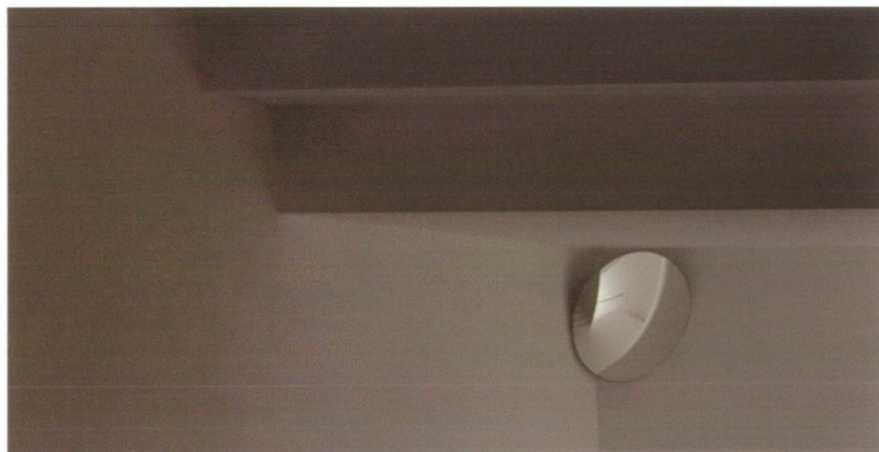


Figure 26





Figure 27

Kalpakjian's *Stair* (2001) [figure 26] and *Hall* (1999) [figure 27], both appear as photographs of existing sites. But closer examination reveals these pristine spaces of dry wall; drop ceilings, mirrors, and linoleum floors as slightly askew. They tend to suggest fictive sites that call into question the distinction between real and virtual space. Using Form-Z software, often favoured by architects and designers, Kalpakjian's eerie spaces are digitally rendered before being produced as cibachrome prints.

I find Kalpakjian's interior spaces both aesthetically and visually fascinating. Although I recognize his images form a seamless conglomerate of fabrication, I am prepared to suspend disbelief in favour of the pleasures of looking. Kalpakjian's images create a convincing imitation of depth, volume and texture that complicates the visual play of truth and falsehood, reality and fiction within a depicted architectural environment.

## Creation of Emptiness: James Casebere

The rapid expansion of large European cities at the end of the nineteenth century led to the creation of the metropolis. The study of this new urban phenomenon and its social effects was supported by the emerging disciplines of psychology, sociology and psychoanalysis and from it developed theories of architectural space as claustrophobic and entrapped and urban space as agoraphobic. The contemporary urban environment I refer to is specifically the interior architecture of both public and private spaces.

Viennese architect Camillo Sitte criticised what he saw as the spatial emptiness of Vienna's new Ringstrasse. He associated this new space of urbanism to the recently-identified anxiety, agoraphobia,<sup>51</sup> saying, 'numerous people are said to suffer from it, always experiencing a certain anxiety or discomfort, whenever they have to walk across a vast empty space'.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the French theorist Legrand du Saulle used the more elusive term 'peur des espaces' to encompass the fear of all spaces – for example empty space, the void, the street, crowded spaces, fear of the ground and vertigo. In 1879 the term claustrophobia was coined in France by Benjamin Ball to describe the fear of confined or enclosed spaces. The term claustrophobia finds its linguistic origins in the old French word cloister, which relates to architectural constructions.

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan emphasised the idea of a 'zone of emptiness'. Within pictorial illusionism the tension

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<sup>51</sup> The irrational fear of public or open spaces.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid p.26. Original source Camillo Sitte, *Planning According to Artistic Principles*. New York: Random House, 1965. (Originally published 1889).

between what we can represent – an architectural depiction – and what we cannot represent – a feeling of spatial anxiety or disorientation has created a void. Lacan defined this void as a space that went beyond what we can represent or give meaning to.



Figure 28

In his book *Stealing the Mona Lisa* psychoanalyst Darian Leader links the creationist concept within the ‘zone of emptiness’ to the contemporary pictorial illusionism of James Casebere’s fictional photographs. Casebere builds and photographs architectural models of empty tomb-like spaces that are deliberately artificial [figure 28]. Leader argues that within Casebere’s images the tension is not between a reality and its representation, but instead between objects that have their existence in the act of creation. Casebere takes a created reality, and then he shows, via a subsequent creating in his photographs, how we create. Leader makes the point that, rather than using the artificial to say something about the artificiality, contemporary strategies such as Casabere’s suggests that the only way to grasp reality is to access it through fictitious worlds. Leader concludes by saying that Casebere does not present the viewer with a representation of emptiness, but rather, confronts us with the creation of emptiness.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *ibid* p.64.

## **Part 3 – studio practice**

### **Introduction**

In this section of the exegesis I shall map the formal and conceptual decisions that have taken place throughout the project. I have approached this chapter by discussing three chronological periods within the studio-based research that, I believe, mark significant developments in the work. Each period of the project comprises an outline of objectives, formal and technical methodologies, outcomes and an assessment of the progress made.

The project's main objective has been to find representations of virtual space through painting, that lead the viewer to speculate and negotiate pictorial spatial shifts. Interior constructs incorporating reflections and mirrors provide the subject for an inquiry into surface and depth. Formal strategies include the manipulation of light, scale, ornament (surface/tactile properties), spatial depth, perspective and colour. These were investigated as possibilities for amplifying the effect the painting has upon the viewer's experience of the pictorial space.

### **Discussion of Methodologies Consistent Throughout the Project**

From the start, the following methodologies were employed throughout all stages of the project. The project involves two different image making strategies – painting and digital imaging methodologies.

## Painting

The works produced for the submission are oil paintings on linen on a wooden strainer. The support has one coat of rabbit skin glue to size/seal the canvas, followed by three applications of titanium based oil primer, sanded lightly between coats.

The following points indicate the standard procedures (with several variations), involved in the early stages of a paintings production.

1. An Imprimatura<sup>1</sup> ground of diluted burnt sienna was laid down on the blank canvas and wiped back with a rag; otherwise it is applied after a monochrome underpainting in raw umber. On occasions the canvas was left white.
2. A line drawing of the digital print was drawn onto the canvas in one of two methods: a) A grid was drawn to scale over the canvas matching the grid drawn over a monochrome<sup>2</sup> digital print of the image. With the aid of the grid the main features of the image are drawn in pencil. b) Both a vertical and horizontal line are drawn through the picture plane at right angles. These two lines match a vertical and horizontal axis occurring in the image; I could expand the drawing of the image working from these two lines (followed by matching diagonals) by using accurate measurements in correct ratio to the digital prints I worked from. Mistakes in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Italian word Imprimatura meaning the priming or ground, often tinted, laid on canvas or panel.

<sup>2</sup> Often the light values are increased in contrast to assist in judging tonal range when producing a monochrome underpainting.

drafting were corrected at this point. This process is further assisted with cut stencils, a large compass and French curves.

3. With the outline drawing complete I proceeded by applying colour, if an Imprimatura was laid down first, otherwise a monochrome underpainting was produced in five tones ranging from the lightest point through to a dark mid-tone relevant to the darkest point on the image. The paint was mixed from raw umber and white diluted with a small amount of underpainting medium and applied with fairly loose brushstrokes.
4. Once the monochrome underpainting was completed, a sense of volume and weight could be gauged through the pictorial space. Once again, any corrections to the composition could be easily made at this stage of the painting.

Each painting was worked up in numerous layers of paint, varying in number depending on the amount of detail required and the effect of light and spatial depth aimed for. The initial layers of body colour were applied thinly with opaque and semi-opaque applications of paint and lean medium. In the final stages thin coloured glazes were applied to specific areas within the painting in order to create a greater sense of spatial depth. The aim of the painting process was to impart a smooth surface quality to the work with minimal variation between the figure and ground.

## Digital Imaging

The role of digital imaging within my studio practice is an important one and integral to the outcome of the painting. Adobe Photoshop software is used to construct and manipulate original source imagery, specifically scanned photographs or digitally captured photographs of interior spaces and surface textures. Working images also incorporate architectural areas and features that exhibit different levels of software fabrication.

Imaging software such as Photoshop is a powerful tool, providing a seemingly unlimited capacity to create and manipulate images. With this in mind I used a limited number of Photoshop's functions and capabilities, specifically those I felt relevant to my objectives.<sup>3</sup> There are other evident advantages to using digital methodologies within my practice. The use of digital imaging to create the preliminary 'drawings' for the paintings is a fast and efficient way to explore ideas as they can be visualised relatively quickly, as opposed to the complex and time consuming process of drawing or model making. As such Photoshop provides a means through which to explore a range of formal and conceptual possibilities within an image before making a commitment to paint.

The spaces created in the computer amalgamate a range of spaces that have different meanings for me. Objects and architectural features, which I am often very familiar with, are

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<sup>3</sup> The digital images are built up in multiple layers; each layer can be worked on separately. The main features utilized in Photoshop are as follows: Colour, tone, saturation, airbrush, cloning/blending imagery, duplicating, cut and paste, selection tools (accurately traces the contours of an object), transform (perspective, scale, flip and rotate), lighting effects, sharpness/blur, transparency.

superimposed and blended with unfamiliar spaces, in order that they appear seamless in the composite picture. The separate elements of the combined images float in individual layers within Photoshop so that each element of the picture can be manipulated separately.

### **Period 1 of the Project**

The first stage (February 2001 – February 2002) resulted in four small paintings and a larger inkjet print. This early phase focused on extending my previous Honours work, which had through Photoshop developed complex pictorial spaces, in terms of the image construction.

### **Objectives**

My initial objective was to identify and explore subject matter that would emphasize more complex means of viewing pictorial space and that would place emphasis on speculation as a form of narrative. The aim was to arrange the figures and props as the visual focus within the pictorial space, thereby enticing the viewer to speculate upon the spatial anomalies created.

My long-standing fascination with mirrors as spatial devices was rekindled by van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Marriage* and Velázquez's *Las Meniñas*. I thought about how mirrors and reflections could occupy a pivotal and ambiguous role in my work. My intention was to explore reflections within an intimate pictorial space as a means of establishing a perception within the viewer of a space extending beyond the



painting. In addition I decided to work on a small scale, utilising shallow pictorial depth in the fashion of still life.

A further aim was to blur the distinction between the figure and ground by rendering a smooth surface that was consistent to all areas of the work, with the intention of bringing the surface of the painting and the pictorial illusion closer together.

### **Formal and Technical Approaches**

Formally, my intention was to make the pictorial constructions appear seamless, through the manipulation and unity of light and the blending together of separate images. It was important to assert surface qualities to impart a consistent and smooth surface that would readily reflect the tactile and transparent qualities of the subject matter.<sup>4</sup> Also, I wanted to create more than one focal point within the image by experimenting with reflections within reflections either within different parts of the image or covering the entire picture plane.

I approached the above concerns through a series of square format, 45 cm x 45 cm paintings. I wanted to make pictures that utilised the framing of the canvas as a device to crop the objects and architectural features within the image. The purpose of cropping was to limit the spatial reading and allow the viewer to ponder the pictorial space and the suggested space beyond the frame of the picture.

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<sup>4</sup> In some of the work the idea was to experiment with covering the entire picture plane with a single reflection, therefore a smooth and even surface texture was important in supporting the illusion of looking through a transparent object, for example, glass or clear plastic.

Numerous photographs were taken of architectural features and objects from different viewpoints around my home environment. I chose to restrict the content to bathroom tiles, shaving mirror, walls, doors, windowpanes and reflections of myself. Through experimentation, photographs were selected and scanned into the computer. Each image went through various trials and different states before the painting process. The paintings were worked up in many layers using thin applications of opaque and semi-opaque paint together with transparent glazes.

The subtlety of the reflections in the digital print posed a problem. They were difficult to execute, as it was the first time I had attempted to paint delicate reflections in order to create the illusion of a transparent surface. The paintings were re-worked over many sessions to achieve a satisfactory result.

### **Specific Works**

*Specular I* [figure 29] was the first painting undertaken during the project. It utilises four elements as content – my reflection, bathroom tiles, a shaving mirror and a concrete wall.



Figure 29

Initial experimentation focused on the entire shaving mirror casting its shadow onto a superimposed wall. The mirror was positioned on a concrete ledge, the image of which, was constructed within the computer and seamlessly blended with the initial photograph to correspond with the light source indicated within the shallow space of the painting.

Further experimentation focused on the tiles, with the purpose of being able to superimpose a diffused reflection of myself onto the surface. I thought about the figurative reflection as a possible device for the viewers to project themselves into the space – the location of the reflection being parallel to the picture plane and thus mimicking the location of the spectator.

In order to enhance the perception of spatial ambiguity, I compressed the pictorial depth further by placing the shaving mirror in the reflection of another mirror; which can only be viewed as a section.<sup>5</sup> The shadows, bevelled edge and airbrushed sheen of the second mirror were fabricated in Photoshop.

*Specular II* [figure 30] amalgamates three pictorial elements – bathroom tiles, colonial door and the faint reflection of a person. Again the pictorial depth of the painting is shallow.

Within Photoshop, I experimented with using the same reflection, located in the rear mirror, to cover most of the pictorial space in the foreground. The tiles were manipulated

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<sup>5</sup> Different experimental states in Photoshop involved adding and altering reflections, colour and opacity manipulation and the formal positioning of the content. Also the manipulation of light within each layer was important in unifying the image.



Figure 30

to create a shallow enclave with the purpose of expanding the pictorial depth. The intention was to experiment with ways of using reflections to subtly disrupt the reading of the space. I reproduced the image of the door as a larger reflection covering the left side of the painting, the aim being to highlight the pictorial space as reflection of the space in front of the painting's surface.



Figure 31

*Specular III* [figure 31] utilises three elements – bathroom tile, concrete wall and a windowpane with water droplets. Following on from the previous image, I used the reflection to cover the entire picture surface. My objective was to create a more ambiguous perspective by altering the viewing angle. While positioning the wall and the reflection parallel to the picture plane, I distorted the plane of the tiles to an oblique angle that recedes from the picture plane,

*Specular IV*<sup>6</sup> [figure 32] depicts the shaving mirror, wall (backdrop), bathroom tiles and hanging light globe.

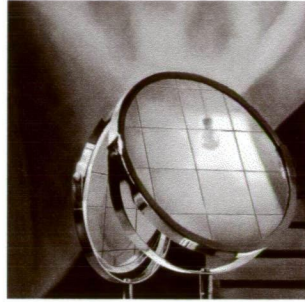


Figure 32

For the last painting of this series I returned to the shaving mirror, however I was interested in depicting it in the foreground of the pictorial space close to the picture plane. My focus was to challenge the viewers' spatial orientation by adding and altering reflections, perspectival shifts and selective cropping of architectural features. I approached these concerns by creating a complex 'still life' using mirrors and reflective objects, which located the action and/or activity.

### Evaluation of Progress

The specific works discussed above were completed during the first year of the project. The paintings achieved some of the project's objectives, identifying significant formal and conceptual strategies that could be further explored - the seamless surface of the painting and the manipulation of reflections and framing to create degrees of spatial ambiguity.

<sup>6</sup> At around this time I produced *Specular* (inkjet print), which is made up of six panels. It is based on the same subject matter as the paintings described above with some variations. Each of the six panels consists of two images sandwiched together.

I felt the scale of the previous work to be less successful in terms of the initial aims. The issue of size became an important consideration because I realised, that if the paintings were larger the pictures might lose the dichotomy between the flat surface and the illusion of depth occurring in some of the smaller works.

## **Period 2 of the Project**

At the beginning of 2002 I began working on a series of new images with the idea of creating larger paintings depicting a deeper pictorial space. The images were sourced from new locations within central Hobart, rather than the interior of my home.

## **Objectives**

My initial intention at this stage of the project was to investigate ways of creating a speculative construct that was more indicative of a bodily space for the viewer. I wanted the work to move beyond the shallow spatial depth of the *Specular* series. The decision to increase the scale of the work both physically, and in terms of spatial depth by zooming out, offered possibilities in setting up perspectival anomalies that could trigger a sensation of disorientation.

## **Formal and Technical Approaches**

I approached these concerns by considering ways of cropping and framing within the picture plane. In addition to this, I wanted the work to test ways of enhancing the spatial

anxiety that stems from the use of tactile surfaces<sup>7</sup> out of character with the surrounding architecture.

The purchase of a high-resolution digital camera proved to be a time saver in collecting and processing potential source material. More importantly, it meant that I could explore more options as subject matter could be readily photographed from many angles and different exposures.

### **Specific Works**

*Untitled 1* [figure 33] uses imagery sourced from three different locations around central Hobart. The painting is pictorially divided into three sections running vertical to the picture plane. The centre section depicts an open doorway, in the middle distance of the pictorial space. On the left there is another doorway projected at an oblique angle so that the wall turns to become parallel to the picture plane. In the foreground, of this section, there is a reflection of a hand railing. A glass-framing device cuts through the painting, dividing it into two sections. The right side section of the painting depicts a wall appearing to recede slightly away from the foreground. On the wall there is

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<sup>7</sup> My initial idea was to fuse rough surface textures such as sandstone with a slick, cold and banal environment.



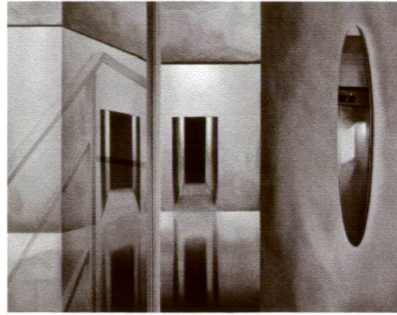


Figure 33

an oval mirror that reflects an elevator door displaying a bright red digital floor number above.

My initial intention was to try to extend some of the spatial shifts evident in the *Specular* series. Mirrors and reflections that both reveal and conceal spatial information and the dichotomy between surface and pictorial depth were the basis for my enquiry. I wanted to create a deeper pictorial space that was more indicative of an actual space that a viewer might walk through.

I utilised shallow pictorial depth for the right side wall, together with the dark void of the doorway, with the aim of keeping the gaze of the viewer travelling from wall to reflection to mirror to the black void of the doorway that goes nowhere. I also wanted to amplify the emotional impact of the space by setting up a tension between the manipulated construction, the artificial lighting and the crude surface texture.

*Untitled 2* [figure 34] depicts an interior that appears to be an unspecified corporate space. An open floor area with tiles in the foreground meanders through the pictorial space from



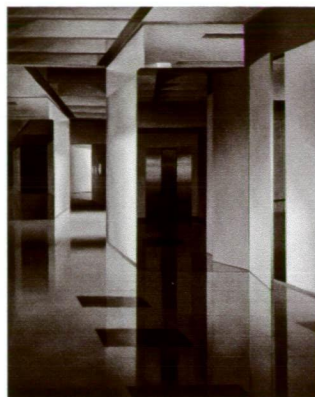


Figure 34

right to left and then right again, around a corner from where light illuminates the receding distance of the pictorial space. The floor's path weaves between two rooms; one positioned further back into the pictorial space than the other. Each room displays an exterior wall positioned parallel to the painting's picture plane. These walls seem to be glass or mirror walls, reflecting spaces both within and outside the pictorial space. Above each of these rooms there is a corner window joining a section of the ceiling. The window indicates the possibility of an ambient light source, other than the fluorescent lights, which are turned off. To the right of the room closest to the viewer a door is ajar indicating the smallest glimpse of what could be another room. In the middle distance light enters the space from behind the room closest to the viewer and suggests another location or entry/exit.

### **Evaluation**

The works produced during the second period of the project resolved many of the major issues that arose from the first body of work. The move to a larger scale was successful in creating a spatial vista to which the viewer can more readily

relate. I felt the second work *Untitled 2* established a stronger sense of anxiety, through the use of muted colours and the lowered viewpoint. Furthermore, the larger view of the floor in the foreground was significant in creating the sense that the viewer could walk, into and through, the space.

I became conscious that the paintings were very hard-edged and linear in their construction. I felt that this could be a problem as it seemed to emphasize the construction of the space rather than the intended effect of generating an experience of disorientation.

### **Period 3 of the Project**

The final two works were completed during this stage of the project.

### **Objectives**

The primary objective in this concluding stage of the project was to build upon, and consolidate, the strategies developed within the first two stages of the project. Specific objectives at this stage were to further investigate deeper spatial depth in order to draw the viewer's gaze into the pictorial space. Formally, my objective was to find a way to visually soften the grid-like architectural spaces.

### **Formal and Technical Approaches**

The limitations of source imagery led me to construct greater portions of the pictorial space virtually and to combine these

results with digital photographs of actual spaces and features.

The desire to study the effects of light led me to construct simple models from balsa wood. From these I could observe perspective and the orchestration of light and reflection within actual spaces. At this point, I felt it important to reconsider the physical experience of architectural spaces, particularly large or labyrinthine buildings that allow me to observe deep space, multiple entry and exit points and multiple light sources.

### **Specific Works**

*Untitled 3* [figure 35] represents a significant shift in my practice as the majority of the working image was fabricated in the computer. Photographic source material, used in the construction process, consisted of the left side wall and mirrors, the doorway and walls at the rear of the pictorial space, the stairs on the right side, and wall surface texture.

From early Photoshop trials<sup>8</sup> the work developed as two separate images – the left side and the right side. I experimented with amalgamating the two spaces with the idea of creating alternate visual entry points for the viewer. I

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<sup>8</sup> Early trials in Photoshop (Image 8 Stairs, Image 12a and Image 11) focused on creating spaces entirely fabricated within the computer as a possible alternative or in support of the digital photographs. The construction process from these experiments informed the Photoshop production of *Untitled 3*.

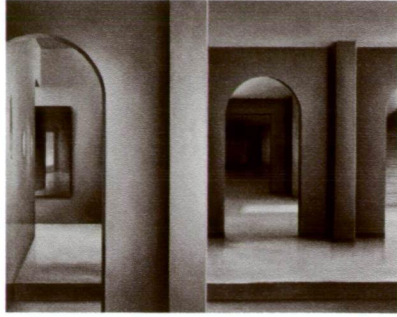


Figure 35

constructed an archway and wall on the left side of the picture and positioned it close and parallel to the picture plane. My intention was to have the wall and the pole dissect the pictorial space in order to create tension between the spaces.

*Arc* [figure 36] amalgamates computer-fabricated space with digital photography. The painting references the multiple archways, small oval mirrors and reflections in the floor and ceiling. The intention was to open up the pictorial space to create a more organic and fluid space through the use of arches and curves.



Figure 36

Initially my intention was to create a complex labyrinth of curves and reflections and experiment with arches that

receded from the picture plane. However, I discovered the more minimal space held possibilities of creating spatial tensions and disorientation through the manipulation of light and reflections (specifically on large flat planes such as floors and ceilings). I then decided to expand the architectural space by experimenting with the panorama format.

## Evaluation

The final two paintings were undertaken during the last ten months of the project. The use of archways in both works was significant in softening the geometric rigidity of previous work. I also felt that the multiple compartments depicted within *Untitled 3* achieved a sense of spatial anxiety by closing down the space and lowering the ceiling and by the addition of a step into the foreground of the work.

I consider the final painting to be a significant shift in the project's exploration of pictorial space. The decision to open up, rather than restrict, the pictorial space allowed new possibilities for exploring spatial anomalies emphasising space, reflection and lighting. This was at variance with earlier works that employed architectural construction as the key instigator in manipulating the responses of the viewer. The panoramic format and increased scale emphasized the viewer's bodily relationship to the space and their virtual navigation within the image. Thus it became clear that, although the pictorial spaces are intended to be speculative and perplexing, it was necessary for the physical features of the space, such as the tactile surfaces and the play of light, to be as convincing as possible. Within the final painting there occurred a shift in the figure/ground relationship

through the manipulation of more pronounced surface texture. This is more evident on the wall in the middle of the painting. The developments have opened up future possibilities in exploring the paint thickness, surface texture and figure/ground issues. In addition I also feel the light and the ambience in *Arc* contains possibilities for exploring ambiguities in space and time (day and night, past and present).



Plate 1





Plate 2





Plate 3

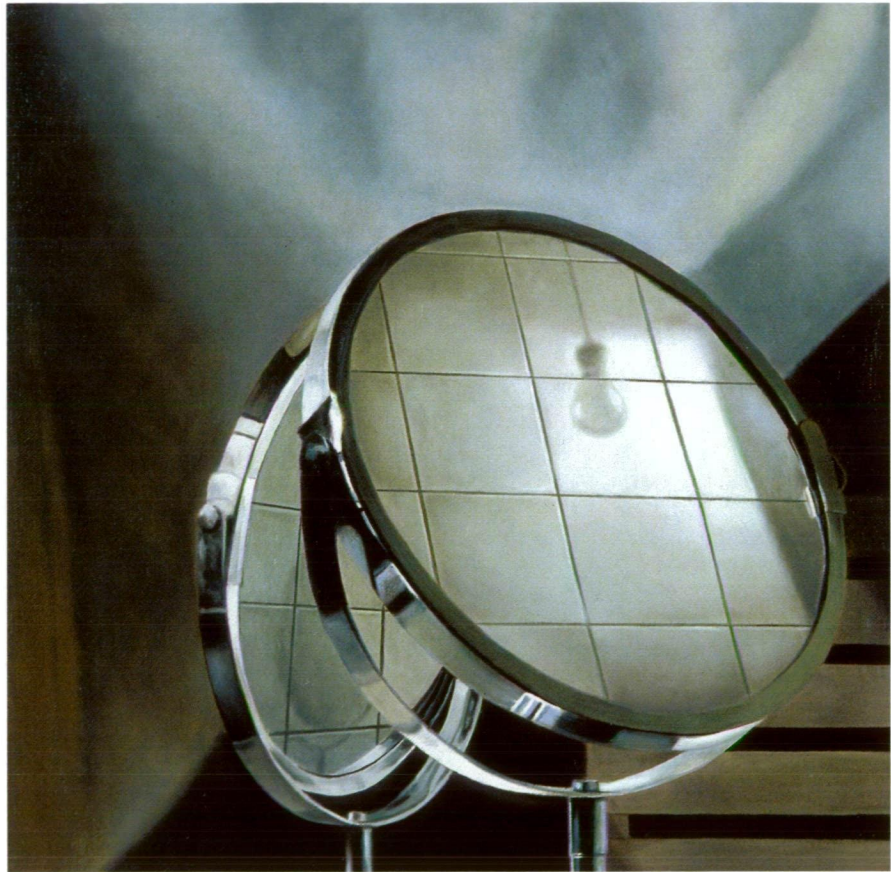


Plate 4

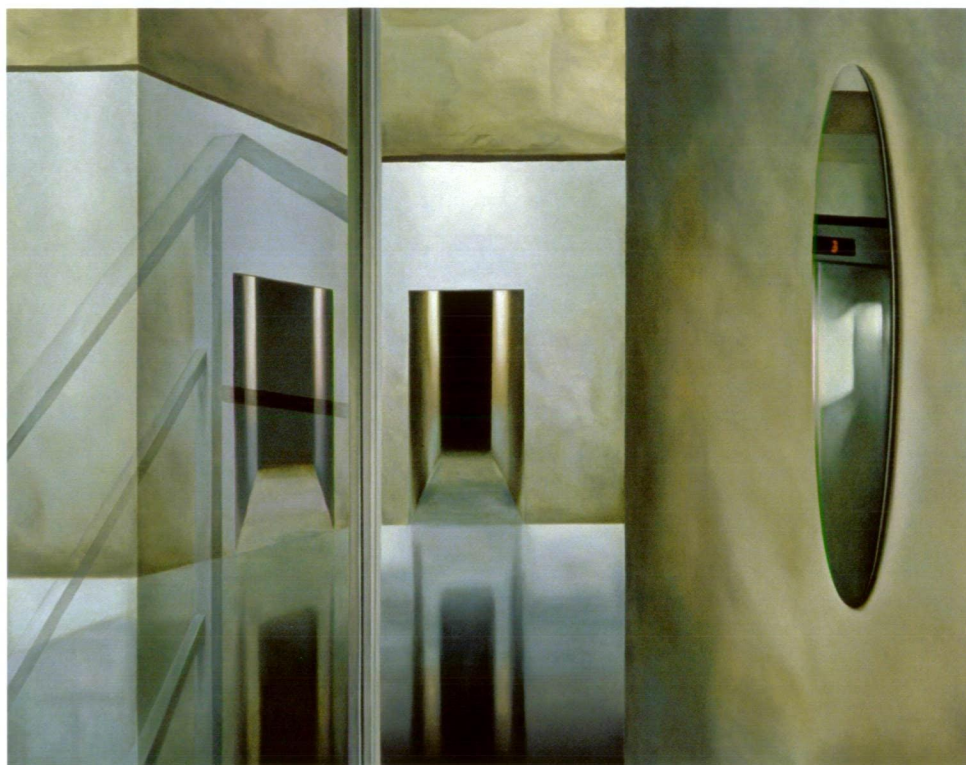


Plate 5





Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8

#### **Part 4 – conclusion**

The project has developed approaches in which to represent virtual space through the construction of pictorial space within painting, and has identified and developed strategies that locate the perception of virtual space within the viewer.

The outcomes of the project are demonstrated in the form of paintings presented for the submission exhibition as the principal output. This comprises works produced during each of the three stages of the studio-based investigation

The problem posed by the project was to find visual form to represent the changing conception of virtual space within painting.

The project has explored alternative ways of depicting the concept of virtual space. Architectural constructs have defined virtual space pictorially, by providing a recognisable format through which the virtual can be generated and navigated perceptually by the viewer.

The project brings together ideas about the representation of virtual spaces within contemporary painting practice. The exegesis includes documentation of practical and conceptual enquiries, together with an exploration of the underlying themes of the project placed in context through the discussion of both historical and contemporary representations of virtual space. The context of the project is located in the development and construction of virtual spaces in painting, both past and present, and the expansion of virtual navigation through the advent of the computer

The project has presented future possibilities in developing virtual spaces entirely within computer software prior to painting. Programs such as Form Z offer painters new ways to define virtual space pictorially. The project has moved from depicting objects as the subject that locates the viewer, to the development of virtual space that is 'spatially' open and less defined by architecture. Most recently my desire to study space has led me to construct models in order to observe perspective, the orchestration of light and reflection within actual spaces. At this point I feel that it has become vital to reconsider the physical experience of architectural spaces, particularly large or labyrinthine buildings that allow me to observe deep space, multiple entry and exit points and multiple light sources, and to consider how these features might be utilized.

My desire to create immersive spaces in painting has led me to attempt to discover how architects have manipulated interior spaces, with particular emphasis upon internal vistas and consideration of the movement of the viewer/occupant through the constructed spaces. At this point in my research I believe that it is vital for me to stand within these buildings and understand them as functioning spaces rather than as photographs.



## List of Plates

1. *Specular I*, 2001, oil on linen  
45 x 45 cm
2. *Specular II*, 2001, oil on linen  
45 x 45 cm
3. *Specular III*, 2001, oil on linen  
45 x 45 cm
4. *Specular IV*, 2001, oil on linen  
45 x 45 cm
5. *Untitled 1*, 2002, oil on linen  
155 x 195 cm
6. *Untitled 2*, 2002, oil on linen  
195 x 155 cm
7. *Untitled 3*, 2003, oil on linen  
155 x 195 cm
8. *Arc*, 2003, oil on linen  
190 x 290 cm

## List of Illustrations

Measurements in centimetres and height x width

- 4     **Van Eyck, Jan**, *The Arnolfini Marriage*, 1434, oil on panel, 81.8 x 59.3
- 5     **Van Eyck, Jan**, *The Arnolfini Marriage*, (detail)
  
- 6     **Velázquez, Diego**, *Las Meninas*, 1656, oil on canvas, 318 x 276
- 7     Diagrams sourced from Critical Inquiry 2 # 4, 1985, p549.
- 8     Diagram (as above)
  
- 9     Diagram (as above)
  
- 10    Diagram (as above)
  
- 11    **Vermeer, Jan**, *The Music Lesson*, c1662-65, oil on canvas, 73.3 x 64.5cm
- 12    **Stoskopff, Sebastian**, *Still life with a Calf's pictures*, 1640, oil on canvas, 87 x 122
- 13    **De Witt, Emmanuel**, *The old Church at Delft*, 1651, oil on panel, 61 x 44
- 14    Diagrams: Linear perspective and projection, sourced Graf 1940.
- 15    **Saenredam, Pieter**, *The nave of the Mariakerk seen to the west*, 1636, oil on panel
- 16    **Fabritius, Carel**, *The Goldfinch*, 1654, oil on canvas, 34 x 23
- 17    **Fabritius, Carel**, *View of Delft*, 1652, oil on canvas, 15 x 32

- 18 **De Hooch, Pieter**, *Courtyard of a house in Delft*, 1658, oil on canvas, 66 x 56
- 19 **De Hooch, Pieter**, *Drinkers in the Bower*, 1654, oil on canvas, 67 x 57
- 20 **Eddy, Don**, *G-III*, 1979, acrylic on canvas, 175.2 x 115.2
- 21 **Estes, Richard**, *Central Station*, 1975, oil on canvas, 115.2 x 144
- 22 **Ralph, David**, *Slippery Slope*, 1999, oil on canvas, 117 x 141
- 23 **Ralph, David**, *Triforum*, 1998, oil on canvas, 157 x 114
- 24 **Johnson, Ben**, *Below the Surface*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 183
- 25 **Johnson, Ben**, *The Token Space*, 1990, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 183
- 26 **Kalpakjian, Craig**, *Stair*, 2001, Gélee print mounted on Plexi
- 27 **Kalpakjian, Craig**, *Hall*, 1999, Gélee print mounted on Plexi
- 28 **Casebere, James**, *Flooded Hallway from Right*, 1998, C-print, 115.2 x 144

**All following works by the artist**

- 1 *Mirror Shadow*, 2000, oil on canvas, 120 x 120
- 2 *Green Room Red Room*, 2000, oil on canvas, 120 x 120
- 3 *Landing*, 2000, oil on canvas, 193 x 136

Figures 29-36: see Appendices (I) - List of plates

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## Curriculum Vitae

### Andrew John Dewhurst

**Born** Hobart 1970

**Education** University of Tasmania  
Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) 2000  
Bachelor of Fine Art 1999

### Exhibitions

- 2003 'Painting the Home', *Inflight Gallery*, Hobart
- 2002 'Synergy', *CSIRO*, Hobart
- 2001 'Halfway There', *Plimsoll Gallery*, Hobart  
'Hazelhurst Art Award', *Hazelhurst Gallery*, Sydney
- 2000 'Game Over', *Plimsoll Gallery*, Hobart  
'In the Realm of the Senses', *Queen Victoria Museum*,  
Launceston
- 1999 'Imago', *Entrepot Gallery*, Hobart  
'Flicker', *Entrepot Gallery*, Hobart  
'Scratching and Biting', *Inka Gallery*, Hobart  
'In the Realm of the Senses', *Entrepot Gallery*, Hobart  
'Free Spirits,' *Sidespace Gallery*, Hobart
- 1998 'Works Under Pressure', *Sidespace Gallery*, Hobart  
'Summer Show', *Entrepot Gallery*, Hobart
- 1997 'Undergraduate Show', *Long Gallery*, Hobart

### Scholarships and Awards

- 2001 Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Scholarship, Montreal,  
Canada
- 2001 Australian Postgraduate Award, University of  
Tasmania
- 2000 University Medal, University of Tasmania